United Nations

Daily Highlights

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FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Secretary-General says he is closely following reports of Iraqi troop movements towards Kuwait; reiterates that any threat to peace and security in region violates Security Council resolutions.

+ Iraq tells General Assembly it is complying with Security Council resolutions despite persistent obstruction by United States; Liberia, Togo, Jamaica, San Marino and Eritrea also speak in general debate.

+ United States says Iraq is violating more Security Council resolutions than any Member State in history of United Nations; warns that it will show same resolve as before if Iraq repeats past mistakes.

+ Djibouti says United Nations must not abandon Somalia, citing promises and commitments in Charter; Brunei Darussalam, Slovenia, Madagascar, Ecuador, Namibia and Ethiopia among other speakers in general debate yesterday.

+ UNPROFOR carries out aggressive sweep in Sarajevo demilitarized zone; says Bosnian Government unit killed 20 Bosnian Serbs on Mount Igman in raid launched from inside zone.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today said he was closely following news reports of Iraqi troop movements towards Kuwait. He reiterated that any threat to peace and security in the region was a violation of Security Council resolutions.

The Secretary-General underlined, as he did yesterday during his meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq, Tariq Aziz, the importance of continued Iraqi cooperation with the United Nations Special Commission and with its Chairman, Rolf Ekeus, as well as compliance with Council resolutions.

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The Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq, Tariq Aziz, today told the General Assembly that his country was ready to comply with Security Council requirements, despite the cruel and extraordinary nature of resolution 687 (1991). The embargo against Iraq represented the most comprehensive regime imposed by the Council. The freezing of assets in foreign banks denied Iraq the resources to purchase food and medicine, while the methods adopted by the Sanctions Committee had negative consequences on the flow of humanitarian goods. It was clear that the application of the embargo was a vindictive process aimed at depriving the Iraqi people of the simplest constituents of human life.

The United States had made various false accusations about Iraq in order to indefinitely delay the lifting of sanctions, he said. It pretended to care for the rights of the Kurds, but had prevented their leaders from honouring an agreement freely reached with Iraq in 1991. President Saddam Hussein had expressed a sincere desire to establish relations with neighbouring Arab States based on the Charters of the League of Arab States and the United Nations. The United States had obstructed those efforts and pressured the States of the region to reject dialogue. Despite the harshness of the resolutions, Iraq had already implemented many of their provisions. It continued to implement the remaining ones legally and correctly. However, the United States persistently obstructed any step towards the correct legal application of the resolutions, and conducted itself on the basis of biased political motives. The Security Council, the General Assembly and the international community should look into that iniquitous and illegitimate situation.

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David Kpomakpor, Chairman of the Council of State of the National Transitional Government of Liberia, today that said that some conflicts within States were so complex that policy makers were forced to debate the merits of peacemaking or peace-keeping, when the main issue should be saving lives. As a result, he told the General Assembly, the international community sometimes reacted with shortsighted measures. Attempts to resolve some conflicts unwittingly overlooked the intransigence of the warlords involved.

The situation in Liberia had evolved into a deadly stalemate, he continued. The overriding principle of the 1993 Cotonou Accord was disarmament and demobilization of the warring factions, but the number of armed groups had mushroomed. The subsequent fighting had created a mass exodus of frightened Liberians to neighbouring countries. The stalemate was the result of the intransigence of the warring factions and their refusal to disarm and demobilize. The Liberian people were ready for peace, which could be realized given the right mix of initiatives. Recent events, including a failed coup and the renewed fighting, reinforced the need for effective action towards disarmament and demobilization. He appealed for greater support for the Economic Community of West African States' Monitoring Observer Group (ECOMOG). The international community must take the high moral ground and provide the resources needed to end the human misery and suffering in Liberia.

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Boumbera Alassounouma, Togo's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, said Africa must shoulder its own responsibilities for conflict resolution. In June, the President of Togo had proposed to the Organization of African Unity (OAU) the creation of an African peace force to to serve as a buffer while peaceful solutions to conflicts were sought. The United Nations must also encourage the peaceful settlement of disputes. The Organization's effectiveness was sometimes diminished by the refusal of some Member States to commit to peace, despite their special responsibilities under the Charter. The Security Council should be broadened to adapt to the current reality.

The elimination of poverty should also be a major United Nations objective, he said. The forthcoming World Summit for Social Development should give adequate attention to that problem. The economic situation in Africa had led to widespread poverty, aggravated by social adjustment programmes. The Agenda for Development was a timely initiative and offered the opportunity to begin a dialogue on fair development. The transition from the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) to the World Trade Organization should include a system of compensation for developing countries adjusting to the new arrangement. There should be an increase in the volume of official development assistance, and more debt alleviation and write-offs. Other flows of capital, including direct investment, should be promoted.

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Jamacia's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Paul Robertson, said no country could control environmental degradation, transnational migrations and diseases such as AIDS by itself. Multilateral solutions had also to be found to such problems as the debt burden, inadequate flows of official development assistance (ODA), the social costs of structural adjustment, and the protectionist measures of industrialized countries. The contribution of the United Nations and its agencies remained vital in enhancing the productive potential of developing countries.

It was time to reassess the roles of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, which needed to quickly adapt to the current global economic system, he said. Jamaica supported an open, non-discriminatory trading system governed by transparent rules, and awaited the implementation of the conclusions of the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the establishment of the World Trade Organization. On military matters, he said the United Nations had a legitimate role in providing assistance to developing and other countries to shift their human and material resources from military to civilian use. He noted, however, that the permanent members of the Security Council were also the world's leading exporters of conventional weapons.

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Gabriele Gatti, San Marino's Secretary of State for Foreign and Political Affairs, said the decisions taken at the International Conference on Population and Development were only a small step forward. However, it was encouraging that the Conference had recognized that all problems relating to the issue of rapid population growth should be addressed. Human rights and dignity must be respected, including the right to make free choices and the rights to development, democratic progress and equality. The family represented the last hope for mankind. All family issues were of the utmost importance, and San Marino had recently adopted new measures for the protection of motherhood and fatherhood.

Development and equitable distribution could only be achieved if the environment were safeguarded, he continued. Too often, environmental protection was sacrificed in the name of economic and national advancement, which damaged the interests of other people and the common well-being. The rich and industrialized countries were regularly destroying the natural environment within and outside their borders. San Marino had created a "Foundation for the Environment" with a very ambitious programme, and hoped for the collaboration and support of the United Nations.

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Petros Solomon, Eritrea's Foreign Minister, said there was a need to restructure the United Nations based on equilibrium between the forces of centralization and decentralization. Certain problems relating to the environment, population and disarmament might require coordinated international action and centralized authority. Others, including the breakdown of political systems and inter-State conflicts, might be better solved by regional actors, institutions and approaches.

The situation in the Horn of Africa, although improving, was far from satisfactory, he said. The region's impoverishment was largely man-made and could not be blamed on the vicissitudes of nature. Decades of war had sapped the people, leaving them susceptible to even minor imbalances in rainfall patterns and natural calamities. International assistance would remain vital for years to come in remedying the consequences of decades of war and turmoil. Reliable and sustainable economic development would be achieved through effective regional cooperation.

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United States Representative Madeleine Albright today told the General Assembly that Iraq was in violation of more Security Council resolutions than any Member State in the history of the United Nations. Exercising the right of reply in the general debate, she said Iraq had sought to evade, ignore and negotiate away its obligations. The only approach it had not tried was compliance.

In his statement to the Assembly this morning, she continued, Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz had misrepresented the facts about Iraq's lack of compliance with Council resolutions and insulted the Organization. It was the

height of cynicism for the Iraqi Government to appeal to the Assembly on behalf of its suffering people. That same Government had destroyed hundreds of Kurdish villages and used chemical weapons against its own civilians.

"Iraq is not the victim. Iraq is the aggressor," she stressed. It was currently moving elements of two divisions close to the Kuwaiti border. She warned Iraq that a repetition of its past mistakes would be met by the United States with the same resolve as before.

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Roble Olhaye of Djibouti told the General Assembly yesterday that the prospect of a functioning civil society in Somalia was now more remote than ever. Meaningful inter-faction talks had ceased, security had evaporated, and the dream of national reconciliation was fading. Meanwhile, the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II) was focusing on the process of withdrawal, with possible departure scheduled for 31 March 1995. For too long, the United Nations had sought voluntary disarmament, conferences on national reconciliation, and a government elected by the people. However, the warlords wanted the political process to end with them, without passing through to the people. They wanted the United Nations to withdraw so that they could settle scores among themselves.

What had been absent from the whole process in Somalia was the voice of the people in selecting legitimate leadership, he continued. Instead, power had been abdicated to bands of gun-holders. A way must be found to give the people a voice, leading to a legitimate government. Leaving Somalia with nothing in place and so many lives at risk would be abhorrent and unacceptable -- a case where a "failed State" had been abandoned by the United Nations. Walking out on a society before restoring it as a functioning entity would set a precedent in United Nations history. Such an action would be far from the hopes, promises and commitments of the Charter.

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The Sultan of Brunei Darussalam, Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'Izzaddin Waddaulah, told the General Assembly yesterday that the world needed stability to increase economic cooperation through trade and investment. Trends towards protectionism must be resisted; States must be encouraged to open up their economies and reward liberalization. He said regional organizations could ease the burden on the United Nations, in line with the Charter. Organizations such as the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) could use preventive diplomacy and promote regional economic cooperation.

ASEAN, of which Brunei was a member, offered a vision of regional cooperation and development, he continued. It did not aim to establish institutions and legal undertakings like the European Union, but to foster a culture of cooperation. Most ASEAN countries had unresolved territorial questions. Sensitive issues of ethnicity, culture and religion were often involved in those countries' relationships with each other. The organization was now discussing how to complete the ASEAN Free Trade Area within 10 years.

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The United Nations, particularly the permanent members of the Security Council, must retain primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. At the same time, a culture of peace and security in South-East Asia was being created through ASEAN.

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Madagascar's Foreign Minister, Jacques Sylla, yesterday called for efforts to make United Nations machinery more effective. Recent experience showed the need to improve the Organization's capacity to prevent breaches of peace and its ability to carry out operations on the ground. Broad international support and the consent of the parties to a conflict were necessary for the success of those operations. They must also be accompanied by negotiations and economic assistance. Diplomacy was the best means to prevent a conflict, while regional cooperation contributed to the success of peace-keeping.

Madagascar was deeply committed to democratic principles and felt they should apply to the international system, he continued. Democratic representation reflecting current realities was needed on the Security Council, without impairing its effectiveness. Any reform must be supported by all Member States. He went on to say that Africa's efforts to achieve economic development had not received adequate financial support. The problems of development could no longer be addressed on an ad hoc basis or through adjustment measures. Structural reform of the international economic system was needed. He called for international support to meet the immediate needs of Madagascar, adding that the country was ready to complete agreements with the Bretton Woods institutions.

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Prime Minister Janez Drnovsek of Slovenia said a measured and realistic expansion of the Security Council would be appropriate, with permanent membership for Germany and Japan. There was also a need to enhance the transparency of the Council's work. The system of consultations should be developed further to provide for the participation of Member States interested in various situations and issues dealt with by the Council. United Nations military and related activities had developed far beyond what was once defined as peace-keeping. Careful reflection on the future direction of those activities was needed. He welcomed the Secretary-General's efforts to develop a system of stand-by forces.

Slovenia was the only successor State of the former Yugoslavia which was not directly threatened by the ongoing conflict in that region, he stated. The horrors of the war against ordinary citizens, mass violations of human rights and breaches of international law were cause for serious concern. The conflict had seriously damaged the image and credibility of the United Nations. It was true that without the involvement of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the tragedy in Bosnia would have been even worse, but humanitarian assistance alone could not be considered a substitute for

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effective policy. The continued militant behaviour of the Bosnian Serbs pointed to the need to reconsider the option of lifting the arms embargo against Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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Jaime Marchan, Ecuador's Acting Foreign Minister, expressed support for the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The General Assembly should commit the necessary resources to enable the High Commissioner to carry out his duties. Ecuador believed in the fundamental right to life, and would not accept the implementation of programmes for population control which allowed abortion. He appealed to the international community to undertake generous humanitarian action in favour of the victims of the Rwandan tragedy.

All States should join forces in safeguarding and restoring the environment, he continued. Rules and conventions were being forumlated, and resources and technical efforts should directed to putting solutions into practice. It was important to develop a greater linkage between the World Bank, the Inter-American Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), on the one hand, and the programmes of the United Nations and the Global Environmental Facility, on the other. He condemned the resumption of atomic tests for warlike ends. Those practices damaged the environment, endangered countries in the test area and ignored the right of all peoples to live in peace and security. Ecuador supported the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the declaration of new nuclear-weapon-free zones. It also supported the creation of an international authority, as proposed by the Holy See, to reduce trade in conventional weapons.and reach the goal of total proscription of all kinds of weapons.

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Namibia's Foreign Minister, Theo-Ben Gurirab, informed the General Assembly that diplomacy had triumphed over confrontation on 1 March this year, with the reintegration of Walvis Bay and the Offshore Islands into his country. That had created an enormous opportunity for regional economic integration, community-building and prosperity. The southern African region presented a good example of transformation from conflicts, instability and suppression to peace, democracy and hope. Namibia was particularly gratified to welcome the new South Africa into the community of nations, as the two countries had struggled together during the apartheid era.

The transformation of the former Southern African Development Coordinating Conference into the Southern African Development Community (SADC) would boost regional economic cooperation and development, he continued. It would also be a step towards the realization of the goals of the African Economic Community, especially in the field of trade, investment and human-resource development. The SADC could augment the mechanism of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) for conflict resolution. Its first major success was peaceful resolution of an attempt to overthrow the democratically elected Government of Lesotho. Africa needed similar successes in other conflict situations, such as in Rwanda, Liberia and Somalia. Namibia was also

an active member of the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic and would continue promoting trade in that area, including the development of fisheries and marine resources, and tourism.

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Seyoum Mesfin, Foreign Minister of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, said deteriorating economic and social conditions in developing countries posed the world's greatest challenge. Action to address concerns such as peace and security and the environment would be misdirected if developing countries were allowed to wallow in poverty. Each conflict in Africa arose from an impossible economic and social situation. The traditional notions of preventive diplomacy, peace-keeping and peacemaking were not enough. The Agenda for Peace was not sufficient without the Agenda for Development.

The Organization of African Unity (OAU) mechanism for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts required effective assistance from the international community, he said. No African country was immune to the political and social consequences of economic decline. That decline could only be arrested through international economic cooperation and development partnership. The transitional Government in Ethiopia had been working to restore peace and stability, democratize the political process and liberalize the economy. The key to the success of Ethiopian democracy was sustainable economic growth and development. Notable gains had already been made in the economic sector, and cooperation with international financial institutions had been encouraging. Due to the challenges that lay ahead, Ethiopia continued to count on the support of the international community.

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French peace-keepers serving with the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) today carried out an aggressive sweep in the Sarajevo demilitarized zone using armoured vehicles and foot patrols, according to a spokesman for the Organization. They drove out some 350 Bosnian Government soldiers who had been in the zone in violation of the demilitarization agreement, and destroyed some bunkers and emplacements.

Yesterday, a French patrol discovered the bodies of 20 Bosnian Serbs who had been camped on Mount Igman, on the edge of the demilitarized zone. They had been killed by a Bosnian Government commando unit which had carried out a raid from inside the zone. Four of the Bosnian Serbs had been sentries, and their throats had been slit. Another four were unarmed female nurses. There was some evidence of a firefight, but some of the bodies had bullet wounds to the back of the neck. Some were found in a tent which had been set on fire.

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